

a kind of bloodletting for the soul,' he says. A catharsis, perhaps, a release of accumulated energy.

One of the most powerful sections in the book is when Franklin writes about Metallica's James Hetfield, and his 'apolitical anger', which wanted to be universal and solid and real but not extremely politicised. Then, years later, Franklin mentions how the band's music was used by US military interrogators during the Second Gulf War in 2003, when prisoners were subjected to the music of Metallica (as well as the children's character Barney the Dinosaur) 'in the hunt for information on the whereabouts of weapons of mass destruction'. Franklin quotes Sgt Mark Hadsell telling *Newsweek* at the time: 'These people haven't heard heavy metal before. They can't take it. If you play it for 24 hours, your brains and body functions start to slide.' In this disturbing context heavy metal becomes a means to intimidate, to weaken, to confine.

Approaching the subject from various angles, Franklin talks to academics, doctors and people in health care about their take on heavy metal and its impact on young people. He questions the genre's relationship to religion, authority, power and sometimes racism, sexism, xenophobia. While he does not shy away from pointing out the problematic parts of the history of heavy metal, he also refrains from generalising everything in one broad brush. Heavy metal is a complex nation. As in any nation we have some bad characters, but that doesn't mean they represent everyone.

Franklin slowly arrives at the conclusion that perhaps heavy metal is a means of acknowledging the parts of ourselves that we would rather not embrace. Thankfully, and rightly, the book does not attempt to de-mystify heavy metal as much as to re-mystify it. To offer a too clinical explanation for this fascinatingly complicated music would be to miss its essence. Only people who do not really listen to heavy metal will try to explain it in sociological terms. The rest of us are more comfortable with things that are not easy to explain in logical terms — the irrational, the raw, the heavy. The book would make a great present for the heavy metal fan in your family — the one who knows that right from the beginning this music has been, and still is, a response to the world with its darkness, uncertainty, fragility, loneliness.

Why is heavy metal still beloved? Because it is not a fashion, a trend that comes and goes, a fleeting number on the charts. You can listen to an internationally popular band and the next minute you can switch to an obscure little band within the same wavelength. Heavy metal is alive because it hits us where it hurts the most. Because it is heavy and noisy and full of contradictions, like life itself.

The triumph of independent thought

Jesse Norman

The Enlightenment: The Pursuit of Happiness, 1680-1790

by Ritchie Robertson

Allen Lane, £30, pp. 1008

History used to be so much easier. There were the Wars of the Roses, then the Reformation, the Civil War, the Enlightenment and finally the Victorians. Each one had its own century and its distinctive tag. Throw in Henry VIII and Elizabeth I, garnish with a few zealots and adventurers, some glorious triumphs and some grisly deaths. It was all part of our Island Story. You knew where you were.

Take the Enlightenment, for example. Everyone knew that this was the Age of Reason: the moment when science finally started to impose order and banish reli-

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gion. The French rationalists had their heyday, Voltaire, the *philosophes* and all that, before they were vanquished by the Scottish empiricists David Hume and Adam Smith and the great commercial acceleration of the late 18th century. As for the English, they did not make much of an appearance, alas. And the French got their comeuppance, as reason got out of control and led to the Age of Revolutions, blood on the streets of Paris and Madame la Guillotine. Or something like that. Still, it ended up well because of the inevitable progress of history and here we all are.

These schoolboy caricatures have long been exploded, of course. But the caricatures had their uses: they were simple, memorable, easy to teach and, in their breadth, an invitation to further inquiry.

Now, however, the academics have had their revenge. Was there really an Enlightenment at all, in any distinctive sense? Was it a movement of ideas, or something more



'I'm dreading Christmas. Now that lockdown's relaxed I'll have to see the bloody grandkids.'

organised? Does it make sense to talk of *the* Enlightenment, or were there plural enlightenments? Was it radical or moderate, or both? Science or Art? Reason or Religion? A host of recent books have addressed these questions.

What has energised debate still further is the degree to which the Enlightenment — always a controversial idea — has become more widely contested and politicised. In particular, the tendency to project modern obsessions back into the past, to find origins and make judgments based on contemporary values, has been pervasive.

Liberals have drawn on the Enlightenment as the foundation for a universal, cosmopolitan and secular modernity, while conservatives have seen it as a source for arid individualism on the one hand and totalitarianism and revolution on the other. In an age of Rhodes Must Fall and Black Lives Matter, the Enlightenment's traditional points of focus are increasingly being made to appear not merely superficial but actively malign. In the words of the late Eric Hobsbawm: 'A conspiracy of dead white men in periwigs to provide the intellectual foundation for Western imperialism.'

Amid such a maelstrom, the general reader can be forgiven for feeling a tad daunted. Now, however, help is at hand, in the form of *The Enlightenment: The Pursuit of Happiness, 1680-1790* by Ritchie Robertson, a work that is at once readable, authoritative and wide-ranging. At 780 pages, plus a considerable body of endnotes, this is a mini-*Encyclopédie*, but the publishers have done well to make it into a handsome single volume, complete with nearly 30 images from the great first editions of the period. The author is a professor of German literature and thought at Oxford University, but whatever the specific subject addressed, the quality of scholarship is uniformly high.

Robertson's goal is straightforward but ambitious: to tell the history of the period in a way that is capacious, nuanced but without needless complexity or academic infighting, and that brings to life the leading ideas, events, people and texts. He counteracts the frequent tendency to over-intellectualise the Enlightenment by widening his focus to include literature, the arts, commerce, agriculture, science and medicine and much else. From the use of statistics to the novel to animal rights and vegetarianism, reaching across perhaps a dozen different nations, the book's range is astonishing.

But Robertson also takes on some of the implicit dogmas of the genre. In the first place, he insists that there *was* an Enlightenment: an extraordinary and connected movement of European thought that arose in large part from the collapse of the authority of Aristotelianism in the early 17th century, the acknowledgement of imperfection in God's creation, and the recognition that, in the words of Galileo: 'The book of Nature

is written in the language of mathematics.' The indirect effect of Newton's towering *Principia* (1687) was to embed this idea vividly in the European imagination; a century later, the same belief inspired the pioneering work of Antoine and Marie-Anne Lavoisier in quantitative chemistry.

Yet Robertson cautions against the mistake of seeing this period as a pure Age of Reason. Reason was centrally important, of course, not as a matter of calculation but in all its discursive and argumentative breadth. This was a time when only a small part of the population of Europe could read, and the vast majority of those who formed elite opinion were church-goers who believed in God. For all but a few, reason was the antidote to superstition and the terrors of nature, not the cause of atheism. Even the sceptical David Hume, widely denounced in his own time as an infidel, was willing to take the oath required to hold a university chair, if Edinburgh or Glasgow had had the wit to appoint him. Voltaire, scourge of church tyranny, is now thought of as a deist who believed in a natural religion.

To the idea of reason, Robertson skilfully counterposes those of sensibility and sociability. John Locke's argument that the human mind was not a mass of innate ideas but a blank slate on which experience might write stimulated huge interest in education across Europe. But it also drew attention to the Aristotelian idea that humans were social animals, possessed of a broadly fixed human nature which was not merely capable of reasoning but emotional, passionate, imaginative and sympathetic. As the limitations of the mechanistic philosophy of the 17th century started to show themselves, so there emerged more supple ways of thinking about specifically human interactions in social, commercial and artistic contexts. Robertson rightly recognises both the conditions faced by many women often treated as chattels, and their growing commercial and political impact, as well as the specific achievements of women such as the extraordinary Catharine Macaulay, whose *History of England* rivalled that of Hume.

In a brilliant chapter, Robertson encompasses Adam Smith's demonstration that even human commercial exchange rests on imagination (for if we are to trade, then I must be able to conceive how my goods may be of interest to you, and you how I may use your goods for my own benefit); Hume's great 'science of man', intended to be a unified and general account of human life in all its major aspects; Diderot's idea of universal sensibility underlying all individual action; and the growing preoccupation of German thinkers with anthropology, culminating in Schiller's *Aesthetic Letters*, in which the balance in human nature is held not by reason or sensibility but by the distinctively human capacity for play.

As this implies, Robertson has no truck



Robert Edge Pine's portrait of Catharine Macaulay, whose *History of England* rivalled that of Hume

with the idea, sometimes advanced by 19th-century German intellectuals, that the Enlightenment was a broadly French phenomenon that largely passed Germany by. His goal is not to be Eurocentric — his interweaving discussions of Islam, India, China and America highlight the porosity of the times — so much as to recognise the pan-European dimension of the flow of thought. Thus Francis Hutcheson was an Ulster-born leader of a Scottish intellectual movement, educated in Glasgow, deeply imbued in Low Countries' Protestantism and the moral writings of the (English) Earl of Shaftesbury and hugely influential in America. Edmund Burke was an Irishman living in England whose greatest intellectual debt was to Montesquieu, a Frenchman. And so on.

And the English? Robertson gives them a qualified place at the table, arguing that in contrast to the French and the Scots, there was no body of English thinkers systematically exploring crucial areas of science or political economy until the 1780s and the emergence of circles of radical dissent around such figures as Joseph Priestley, Richard Price and William Godwin and his brilliant wife Mary Wollstonecraft.

But this is, surely, too narrow a reading. After all, the 1760s had seen the emergence of one of the most dazzling intellectual and artistic groupings ever assembled, at Dr Johnson's Club. Without exception they can be accounted enlightened thinkers and doers. The adopted Englishman Burke was defining representative government, making the case for party as a stabilising force in politics

and pioneering intelligent political communication through his published speeches; Reynolds was laying an institutional basis for the fine arts through the new Royal Academy; Garrick leading a naturalistic revolution in the theatre; Gibbon transforming the understanding of Roman history for an English audience. As for Johnson himself — a keen amateur chemist — he made a foundational contribution to virtually every branch of writing he touched, including journalism, fiction, poetry, criticism, satire, biography, the essay, travel writing and, of course, lexicography, with his great *Dictionary*. Since part of Robertson's aim is to scout the Enlightenment's impact in all these wider areas, it can hardly be relevant that these men tended to act as individuals rather than as a collective.

Without risking charges of nationalism or a naive English exceptionalism, one might go still further. It is hard to imagine the Scottish Enlightenment taking form as it did, for all its distinctively

Scottish roots and basis in the great universities, without the Act of Union 1707. All the leading thinkers of the time recognised its importance: as Adam Smith said: 'The Union was a measure from which infinite good has been derived to this country.' It remains an astonishing irony that Scotland is presently governed by a political party that purports to celebrate the distinctiveness and achievements of their nation while disowning its crowning glory, and the Union's role in it.

In part because there was no English revolution in the 18th century, there has been a latent tendency to write the English out of the picture. But, as Robertson recognises, the English had had their political revolution in 1688, and intellectual and religious ones before that. He rightly highlights the centrality to European thought of Newton, Boyle, Locke and Hobbes.

But one could perhaps argue the case of Francis Bacon more than Robertson does. For it was Bacon who said, and devoted his own life in different ways to the idea, that *Quisque faber fortunae suae* — everyone is maker of their own fortune. If ever there was an ambition that guided the Enlightenment pursuit of happiness, for good or ill, or the great Kantian injunction to dare to think for oneself, that is it. And the need for independent thought, conditioned always by a knowledge of history such as this, has rarely been more important than today.

Jesse Norman MP is the author of books on Edmund Burke and Adam Smith.